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## DOMENICI: CARA BUDGET GIMMICKS COSTLY

### Appropriating \$450 Million to Launch \$3 Billion Annual "Gravy Train"

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today criticized the budgetary gimmicks included in a version of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) that would automatically spend \$15 billion over five years at the expense of American Indian and public lands management programs.

Domenici serves on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee that today began consideration of the Senate substitute to CARA that would create a trust fund for the purposes of: federal and state land acquisition; coastal impact assistance even in states where there is no offshore oil and gas production; urban parks; historic preservation; conservation easements; and other activities. The substitute was developed by Senators Frank Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.).

Domenici, who is chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, was sharply critical of the funding mechanisms in the bill. They would direct Congress to appropriate \$450 million annually for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which would trigger the automatic release of \$3 billion to spend on other select programs.

"This is bad budget policy, even if it doesn't technically violate the Budget Act," Domenici said. "While there are worthy programs in this bill, I don't know that they are worth \$3 billion in automatic spending every year. Under any other bill, we would call this an entitlement. We should call it such and have a straight-up vote on whether we really want a new entitlement of \$15 billion over the next five years."

If Congress funds \$450 million for a program under the regular appropriations process, only \$450 million is spent. But under this unusual proposal, if Congress appropriates \$450 million, the actual amount spent will automatically exceed \$3 billion.

"This plan puts these programs on automatic pilot and gives these spending priorities special status at the expense of other important priorities," Domenici said.

Domenici warned that the \$3 billion entitlement would penalize programs like the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Endowment for the Arts, backlogged maintenance and operation needs for the national forests and monuments, and energy efficiency programs. For example, if this bill were law now, the \$3 billion would be subtracted from the \$15.5 billion approved by the Senate this week for the FY2001 Interior Appropriations Bill.

"This bill has some very exciting things in it, and taken in pieces I might lead the parade in supporting them. But this ends up being a gravy train for a select few programs at the expense of everything else in the Interior Appropriations Bill. The bill assumes Congress will add another \$3 billion to meet the needs of the BIA and other programs. We have no assurances that will happen, leaving us with an even more restricted pot of money to fund public lands fire management and our responsibilities to the Indian people," Domenici said.

The Energy committee will continue its markup of the H.R. 701 substitute on Thursday. Domenici has indicated that he may offer amendments to try to improve the measure.